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THE CULTURE OF THE COMANCHE INDIANS

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121 The purpose of this paper is to describe the manners, customs, social and political institutions, and the state of mental development of the Comanche Indians, together with some notice of their implements, weapons, camp sites, and means of subsistence. Because of the nature of the information available it has been necessary to place the emphasis on the more intangible matters rather than on artifacts and other concrete remains which might interest the members of this society more. Indeed, the writer fears that what he brings will be of little value to a society created primarily for the purpose of gathering, classifying and studying the bones, utensils, and implements of the aborigines of this section and less concerned with Indian relations and the thought, habits and customs of the races that preceded us.

131 The Comanches are not aborigines of this immediate section. In fact, they had for some time been in contact with the French on the east and southeast and the Spanish on the west and southwest before they began to frequent any part of Texas. However, for a century and a half they did claim as their home a great part of that region which we designate with the indefinite term West Texas; and the tribal name will forever be linked with the border tragedy, history and romance of this region.

000 Although the purpose of this paper is not to deal with Indian relations, some notice of the general Indian situation in West Texas during the Spanish period may well serve as an introduction to a more specific study of the Comanches. When Coronado came, in 1541, he probably found Apache bands in this region.[1] As he moved into Kansas he met with tribes of the great Caddoan family, and the people of Quivira, that city of gold that turned to clay and grass when he at last found it, are identifiable with the Wichitas who belonged to that family. Although the great "conqueror" did not visit eastern and central Texas, it is reasonably certain that many Caddoan bands lived there also. After Coronado, various

1. F. W. Hodge, Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 30 (Washington, 1907), 1-63.

[pp. 1-57 not processed]

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other Spanish explorers visited the high plains of Texas and the prairie country to the east, but the records they have left do not add greatly to our knowledge of the natives of the region. During the Seventeenth Century the upper Colorado and Concho region became especially well known to the Spanish since adventurers were attractd there by the pearls found in the mussels so plentiful in those streams. They found the Jumano Indian (probably a band of the Wichitas) in this region, who were mortal enemies of their neighbors the Apaches. Naturally the Jumano welcomed the Spanish as possible allies. The prospects of pearls appealed to Governor Cruzate of New Mexico just as the promise of a harvest of souls struck the imagination of Fray Nicolas Lopez, Custodian of Missions. Hence, in 1684-'85, a party of priests and soldiers established a temporary mission among the Jumano near modern Ballinger. Here, according to their chronicle, the Spanish and their Indian allies killed for a certain feast four thousand buffaloes. Although the Spanish had erected a crude building and planted crops the mission was soon abandoned because of conditions and circumstances that need not concern us in this paper.[2] However, it is significant that at this time Caddoan bands were to be found in the Abilene country, in the midst of the more nomadic Athapascans. Our section was border-land between the nomadic tribes of the plains country and the more sedentary Indians of central Texas, who raised gardens and built large and comparatively substantial grass lodges. Camp sites now being discovered and examined by members of this society confirm this fact. A few days ago at a point a few miles south of Abilene, Dr. Ray pointed out to me certain camp sites on or near loose soil well suited for the crude system of Indian farming. Here we found large fire circles and pieces of metates for grinding corn, indicative of the more permanent camp sites of the agricultural Indians; but at another site near by (although it may have been occupied many decades later or earlier), small piles of fire-stones scattered closely over a narrow valley, indicate that here, for a short while, a more nomadic people lived.

Early in the Eighteenth Century both the Spanish and the French came to know more about the Indians of Texas and their accounts

2. A good summary of these Spanish expeditions into West Texas is given by W. A. Stephenson, in the West Texas Historical Association Yearbook (Abilene, 1926), 11-44-54.

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C
648 are much easier to interpret. During this century there was a southward shift among the more nomadic tribes in what is now eastern Colorado and New Mexico and western Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas. The Osages, in the northeast,[3] tended to drive the Wichitas south. Furthermore, at about the opening of the century, the Comanches, who were probably being crowded by the Cheyennes, came from the north into eastern New Mexico and the Panhandle of Texas. Here they clashed with the Apache tribes and Indian tradition tells of a terrible nine days' battle fought between the Comanches and the Lipan-Apaches on the *Rio del Fierro*, (River of Iron), which Bolton identifies as the Wichita.[4] The Apaches were forced to give way and retreat towards the west and south. The Comanches continued this southward migration and, in 1758, they and their allies, the Wichitas, Hasinaies, and probably some of the Caddo tribe proper attacked the Franciscan mission on the San Saba, near the present site of Menard, and killed two of the friars and several other Spaniards. Thenceforth the Comanches claimed as their home the country as far south as the San Saba, and, indeed, during the years that followed they occupied at one time or another most of the country as far south as Bexar. In his map of Texas in the eighteenth century, Bolton shows the Indian situation in the western half of Texas as follows: The Apaches occupy the region northwest of the *Camino Real*. which ran from the Presidio del Rio Grande to Bexar, with the Lipan-Apache extending as a kind of protruding finger eastward into the country around the present Mason; north of the Apaches are the Comanche tribes and east of these, divided by about the ninety-eighth meridian, were the Wichitas.[5] It would not do violence to the facts to state that the West Texas Indian situation remained thus until the Indians were displaced by white settlers.

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181 It has already been stated that the Wichitas were an agricultural people, although they relied extensively on the chase for subsistence and were fiercer and more nomadic than their other Caddoan kinsmen. On a framework of poles, sometimes fifty feet in diameter, they
W
342 constructed comfortable grass lodges, the whole when completed looking somewhat like a giant bee hive of the old fashion.

3. See H. E. Bolton, Athanase De Mezieres and the Louisiana-Texas Frontier, 1768-1780 (Cleveland, 1914), 1-19, note 2, for the shifting during the eighteenth century.

4. Ibid., p. 25.

5. De Mezieres, I, Frontispiece.

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looking somewhat like a giant bee hive of the old fashion. They raised crops of corn, pumpkins and possibly tobacco. On the other hand the Apaches practiced agriculture only to a limited extent and commonly lived in crude brush lodges. Although they had but few arts their women were skilled basket makers.[6] In contradistinction to these other tribes, the Comanches, like their allies the Kiowas, never planted seed of any kind. Thus the Caddoan, Shoshonean, and Athapascan families have all been represented in the Abilene country at one time or another. It seems that the Wichitas and Apaches were here from time immemorial, but the Comanches were late comers. The stone artifacts we find in this country may have belonged to the Wichitas or Lipans; but it is not likely that any stone implement found here, excepting perhaps stone hammers and clubs, were ever used by the Comanches. Long before the latter tribe had reached this country, iron, steel, tin and copper had pretty well supplanted the stone and bone implements used by their forbears. Naturally this improvement in implements, together with the introduction of the horse worked some transformation among them; but we cannot follow this out because we know practically nothing of their culture before they came in touch with a higher civilization.

In physical appearance there was little to distinguish the Comanche from his fellow plains savages of other tribes. The artist Catlin described the race as "in statue rather low, and in person, often approaching to corpulency"; and stated that they were not as large and handsome as the Kiowas. He added that, "In their movements they were heavy and ungraceful; and on their feet one of the most unattractive and slovenly-looking races of Indians that I have ever seen." But the mounted Comanche presented an entirely different appearance. Once on his horse, he continued, "He gracefully flies away like a different being."[7] Some twenty years later, about 1854, Captain R. B. Marcy, of the United States Army, described the men as of "About the medium statue, with bright copper-colored complexions and intelligent countenances, in many instances with aquiline noses, thin lips, black eyes and hair, with but

6. For the picture of a Wichita village see George Catlin, North American Indians, Being Letters and Notes on their Manners, Customs, and Conditions, written during eight years' travel amongst the wildest tribes of Indians in North America, 1832-1839 (Edinburg, 1926), II, plate 178. On the Apaches see Hodge, Handbook, I, 65-66.

7. North American Indians, II, 74 and 84.

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142 little beard."[8] However, it should be remembered that there had [144] been some Mexican admixture with the Comanche blood even as early as Catlin's time. All accounts agree that the women were generally low of stature, ugly and repulsive in appearance.

302 The men wore their hair long and generally ornamented it profusely, while the women cropped their hair close to the head. A Comanche dandy was most fastidious about his appearance and spent much time in the preparation of his toilet, especially if he was about to enter the presence of strangers. He did not shave, but instead, plucked his face clean of its scant growth of beard; and sometimes he also pulled out his eyebrows.[9]

291 The dress of the men consisted of leggins and moccasins, a breech cloth or flap, and a buffalo robe thrown over the shoulders if the weather was cold. Catlin's picture of a chief's children, made near Red River in 1834, shows the younger children naked, while the larger girls were comfortably and decently clad in buckskin, including mocassins, leggings, and a slip or dress with sleeves extending to the elbows and skirts well below the knees. Naturally there were many variations in dress and the buffalo and buck-skin were gradually supplanted by cloth and blankets secured from traders.[10]

291 A combination of the savages and civilized in dress sometimes 177 produced ludicrous results. A description of a prominent Comanche as he rode into camp on the Clear Fork, in Shackelford County, in 1854, runs thus:

> Naroni rode in grand costume. He wore an old blue military coat, with tarnished epaulettes, and covered with bullet buttons, a wampum necklace, almost equal to a breast-plate, numerous ear-rings, finger-rings, and a large ring in his nose, completely encircling his mouth, and bright red leggins.
>
> But his crowning glory was his head dress. From the crown of his head started out four long eagle's feathers, two on

8. **Exploration of the Red River of Louisiana, in the year 1852, by R. B. Marcy, Captain Fifth Infantry, United States Army, assisted by George B. McClellan, Brevet Captain, United States Engineers, Washington, 1854; 33 Congress, 1st Sess. House Document (not numbered), page 98.**

9. **Special Report of Surgeon Alex B. Hasson, Fort Phantom Hill, 1852, in the Gazette, Austin, 1857.**

10. **North American Indians, II, plates 165-172. See, also, Marcy, as cited 98-99.**

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each side. To the center was attached his buffalo hair plait, 291
studded, at intervals of an inch or two, with enormous silver 177
medallions, of an oval shape, and at least four inches in largest diameter. This plait swept the ground, and he seemed to set great store by it, as nothing would induce him to part with one of the ornaments. A rifle and bow, quiver and arrows, completed his costume and equipments; but being slender in figure and short in stature, his appearance was not at all imposing.

In contrast to Naroni other Indians are described: 291
"Straightfellow was very miserably clad, dirty and ragged, with a very forbidding countenance, indicative of cunning and cruelty." While the women impressed the writer as being "Ugly, crooked-legged, stoop-shouldered, squalid and dirty, with haggard and prematurely old countenances, their hair cropped close to their heads, and with scarce a rag to cover their nakedness.[11]

The wonderful physical stamina of the American Indian has often 147
been commented upon by enthusiastic writers who have been wont to contrast their rugged physiques and powers of endurance with corresponding qualities in the softer and more effete civilized people. Doubtless nature, manifesting herself in the harsh environment of the plains country, mercilessly worked towards the elimination of weaker individuals so that those who survived to the age of maturity were generally sound. However that may be, it is certain that the Comanches had lost this physical superiority (if, indeed, they ever had it) by the time they had completed their southward migration. The fecundity of the women was low for a savage [842]
people, death of the mother at child-birth was not uncommon, and 164
rheumatism caused much suffering. Diseases brought by white intruders, such as Cholera, Smallpox and syphilis swept away many of the savages.[12] For smallpox they had no remedy other than [757]
the sweat bath followed by the cold plunge.

11. W. B. Parker, **Notes Taken during the Expedition Commanded by Captain R. B. Marcy, U. S. A., through Unexplored Texas, in the summer and Fall of 1854** (Philadelphia, 1856), 194.

12. The archives of the Indian office of the Republic of Texas, at Austin and of the United States Indian Office at Washington contain references to these diseases too numerous to cite. Also, the Bexar Archives and the Archive General, at the University of Texas and Mexico City respectively, indicate that during the Spanish period smallpox frequently ravaged the Comanche bands. For more general statements see, The Report of Alex B. Hasson, as cited and James Mooney, Calendar History of the Kiowa Indians, Seventeenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology, I, 173, 289, 168, 172, 176, 274, 311, 177.

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342 The Comanche tipi represented a wonderful combination of utility and portability. A dozen or more slender poles were tied together at the top and set up so as to form the frame-work of an irregular cone of such diameter as the material at hand and the size of the family made practicable. This framework was covered with buffalo hides, flesh side out, and offered excellent shelter, while an opening and flap at the top assured ventilation. The flap could always be adjusted so that the opening was protected from the prevailing wind on the same principle that ventilators on our modern buildings are constructed so as to shift with the wind. Recently the writer spent a hot August evening in a Comanche tipi constructed along traditional lines except that canvas rather buffalo hides served for covering. There was no smoke and the place was comfortably cool, notwithstanding the small fire in the center. Close examination re- [354] vealed the fact that the covering was not drawn completely to the ground, but that instead an air space of several inches was left all around. This, together with the opening at the top, made for perfect ventilation. Had the night been cold, the canvas could have been drawn completely to the ground, thus sacrificing ventilation to comfort.

648 The Comanches were a nomadic people and as late as 1850 a 619 wandering band might be found in the valley of the Platte or in [361] the plains of Durango, fifteen hundred miles further south. There was not a single Comanche tribe, but rather several distinct tribes, having but few relations the one with the other. The Penatekas, were the southernmost band or tribe and are most often heard of in the history of Texas. Occasionally they got in touch with the northern bands when the latter came down to the Brazos or Clear Fork to spend the winter or when some of the young men of the different bands, joined perhaps by their allies the Kiowas, put out for the Mexican border for a joint raid. Sometimes the Penatekas [578] were even in a state of war with their northern kinsmen. Naturally when the chiefs of a given band made a treaty it was binding only on their immediate followers. Hence, their kinsmen who lived afar off were likely to ignore it even if they should hear of it. Furthermore, the nomadic habits of the Indians and the resultant divisions and subdivisions of the bands into small parties away from responsible leaders made it impossible for the chiefs to control their

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own men. It is safe to say that the wild Comanches never kept a treaty and in the matter of treaty breaking some excellent examples were set by their white neighbors.[13]

The records available—and they are exceedingly scant and unsatisfactory—indicate that the political institutions of the Comanches were meager and poorly defined. Each band had a head civil chief and a head war chief, selected by the council of chiefs and leading men. In this connection I may state that I have never seen any satisfactory account of the manner in which chiefs were selected, or any definition of just what constituted a chief. It appears that heredity was one consideration but not the only matter of determining the status of a man in the tribe. Absolutism and the idea of divine right found little consideration in a Comanche camp. The chief or head man who proved tactless, cowardly, or inefficient would soon be supplanted: but this readjustment would likely take place gradually and by common consent rather than by formal procedure.

In all matters, even war, the head civil chief was superior to his war chief, but if the civil chief was aged and decrepit and the war chief vigorous and popular this civil superiority would be more theoretical than real. Verily, among the Comanches the man made the office and not the office the man. However, the war chief was apt to be the son, natural or adopted, of the head civil chief; and the most insolent Comanche brave had respect for the council of his elders.[14]

In theory, at least, the council was supreme, but its decisions were often indefinite and left each chief or head man a large measure of freedom of action. Generally the majority made little effort to impose its will on the minority.

During the later period, custom and the concensus of opinion, public opinion, we might call it, were practically the only sanctions behind Comanche law. However, it is likely that before the tribe

13. The Spaniards often commented on the difficulty of holding the Comanches to treaties. See The Baron de Ripperda to the Viceroy, August 25, 1772, in Bolton's **De Mezieres**, as cited, I, 342. The Anglo-Americans found that this problem increased with the passing of the years.

14. These statements represent my own opinions based on extensive reading and study in both Spanish and English sources. The tribal practices in these matters varied if we are to reconcile the different conflicting accounts. Josiah Gregg gives the matter some consideration. See **Commerce of the Prairies** (New York, 1845), 306-307, in R. G. Thwaite's **Early Western Travels**, XX, 342-343.

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622 became demoralized through contact with the white race and the desperate struggle for existence this brought about, the chiefs exercised more authority.[15] Cases of the formal arraignment and
622 trial of a warrior or chief, were exceedingly rare, if such ever
627 occurred; for the writer has never discovered a well authenticated record of such a procedure. A chief or leading brave might lash
[578] a boy or woman, but to strike another brave or chief generally meant a feud or civil war. Differences between tribesmen were settled by those directly concerned or by the relatives of the slain party. Of course, the law of an eye for an eye prevailed, but generally the heart of the offended party could be softened by judicious gifts. Generally the chiefs could make the men behave while they were in their presence and most men followed the admonition of their elders and leaders as a matter of course.

595 Polygamy was common, but before the advent of the white race
684 and its demoralizing influence on the savages the chastity of Comanche women rated high. During the period of Anglo-American relations it was not uncommon for a woman to run away from her husband in company with a spouse more to her liking. Traditional Comanche law provided that in such cases the offended husband might punish the woman by cutting off her nose, but this horrible practice was not always followed. In at least some cases the husband took back his erring spouse and rejoiced in his good fortune at being able to recover her.

221 For sustenance the Comanches depended almost entirely on game,
224 particularly the buffalo. These animals were generally hunted on horseback and brought down with the lance or shot with arrows at close range. Dependable authorities state that at times the Indians would drive the arrows completely through the carcass of the animal.[16] The natural tendency was for the bands to follow the buffaloes in their northward and southward migration, which practice made a sedentary existence impossible. At certain seasons, when the animals were fat, the hunt became a tribal affair and the slaughter of the great beasts took the shape of a cooperative

15. It is Mooney's opinion that the authority of the Kiowa chiefs suffered a sharp decline as a result of the advent of the white race and it is likely that the same thing occurred among the Comanches. See the Kiowa Indian Calendar, as cited, 233.

16. See Marcy, Exploration of Red River, as cited, 98.

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undertaking. Generally the men did the killing while the women dressed the carcasses, loaded the meat on pack animals, took it to camp, and cooked it for immediate use or dried it as the occasion demanded. Some women were also hunters of recognized prowess.[17]

In seasons of plenty the squaws boned and split the meat, carved it into long chains, and threw it over poles to dry in the sun. Meat intended for immediate consumption was dried or cooked over a fire.

Naturally the Comanche women were adepts at tanning hides. The tanning of a deer skin is described thus:

> Having soaked the skins thoroughly, then throw them over a smooth log leaned against a tree at an angle, and then taking a rib of a deer in both hands, remove the hair by scraping it against the grain; they then stretched and dried them, when they became beautifully soft and white. To color them, they tied several into chimney shape, hung to a limb, and building smoulder fires under them they soon changed to a yellowish brown on the hair side, and light yellow on the flesh side.[18]

A somewhat different account is given by another observer. He states that:

> The skins were first staked down to the ground, flesh side up. With a sharp bone the squaw then scraped off every particle of flesh; next the scraped surface was spread with lime to absorb the grease, after which the surface was spread with the brains of the animal, rubbing it in and working it over till the skin became soft and pliable, the process requiring days and days of hard work.[19]

All authorities agree that the Comanches were unexcelled as horsemen. Catlin was amazed at their trick of dropping their body

17. In Notes Taken With Marcy, Parker tells of one woman, the widow of the Penateka chief, Santa Anna, who was said to have killed with her rifle as many as fifteen deer in one forenoon (pp. 192-193). Captain Marcy tells how he observed two young Comanche women of a northern band mount their horses and pursue and lasso each a young antelope which they brought back in triumph to the camp. Exploration of the Red River, 95.

18. Parker, Notes Taken with Marcy, 198-199.

19. Noah Smithwick, The Evolution of a State, Recollections of Old Texas Days, Compiled by his daughter, Nanna Smithwick Donaldson, Austin, Texas (not dated).

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upon the side of the horse thus making of the animal a perfect screen between themselves and an imaginary enemy. "In this wonderful condition," he relates, "he will hang whilst his horse is at fullest speed, carrying with him his bow and his shield, and also long lance of fourteen feet in length, all or either of which he will wield upon his enemy as he passes; rising and throwing his arrows over the horses' back, or with equal ease and equal success under the horse's neck." Finally the artist learned that a partial explanation of the marvel was in the fact that a short hair halter was passed under the neck of the horse and both ends tightly braided into the mane on the withers. Through this loop the young warrier ran his arm and thus secured an anchor and rest for the fore part of his body.[20]

Horses were naturally the only form of wealth available to the Comanches. They were both useful and easily moved and an Indian's wealth was measured by the number of horses he possessed. Their horses were of good, indifferent or poor quality, depending on the success a given band had had in recruiting their scrubby mustang herds with better bred animals taken from the Mexican or Anglo-American frontier. With these Indians horse-stealing was both a science and an art and no warrior's training was complete until he was proficient in this respect. At the camp on the Clear Fork, in 1854, previously referred to, one warrior carried a shield "Ornamented with a *human scalp*, a grizzly bear's claw and a mule's tail, significant of the brave warrior and successful hunter and horse-thief."[21] Chief Is-sa-keep, of a band of northern Comanches, once told Captain Marcy that his four sons were as fine young men as could be found, that they were a great comfort to him in his old age, "and could steal more horses than any other young men in his band."[22] The brave's best horse was always saved for the hunt or war party and the Indian had that love for their favorite steed that always characterizes good horsemen.

As is the case among most savage peoples, war was a normal condition with the Comanches. For instance if expediency dictated that there be peace between the Comanches and Osages, the Texas

20. North American Indians, II. 73-74.
21. Parker, Notes Taken with Marcy, 195.
22. Exploration of the Red River, 97.

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border was still inviting and there the braves could find horses to steal and ranches to plunder; if there must be peace with Texas, there was at least one happy war ground, which according to Comanche ethics, was always a legitimate field of operation. That was Mexico. And hither the young braves would go, notwithstanding the more or less perfunctory efforts of the governments of the United States and Texas to stop them.

War with the Comanches might call forth united tribal effort or it might concern but a small party of warriors, depending on the circumstances. The chief or head man who wished to lead off a war party paraded through the camp, carrying in some cases a long pole with a red flag tipped with eagle's feathers, chanting a war song. If he was a popular leader and the bands was in a war mood, or if he could convince the young braves that his enterprise promised large returns by way of scalps, prisoners and booty, he would soon collect about him many warriors. War dances would be held, the leading men would make talks, runners would be sent to other bands and the expedition would take on large proportions. No warrior was obliged to join, but the young man who always stayed at camp would obviously soon become the object of much ridicule. However, the tribe was not entirely at the mercy of these young hot-spurs. If the expedition was likely to result in the flagrant violation of a popular treaty or if it was calculated to bring down upon the tribe the wrath of a powerful enemy, a more conservative sentiment would prevail and the movement would be nipped in the bud.

In this connection some description of Comanche weapons should be given. Although they acquired a few guns from white traders at a very early date, primitive weapons were all that a great majority of the tribesmen had as late as the middle of the nineteenth century. Their bows were of bois d'arc, rather short for long bows, being ordinarily not more than three feet in length. Sometimes they were wrapped with the sinew of the deer, and the bow string was of the same material. Their arrows were about twenty inches long, of flexible wood, with a triangular spike, or point, of iron. Two feathers intersecting each other at right angles were bound to the other extremity of the arrow and served to guide it. They frequently carried lances, one of which is described as "a piece of

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411 steel, about two feet and a half long and an inch wide, tapering to a point, fixed into a slender handle of bois d'arc, the whole weapon being about seven feet in length.

714 411 The Comanche shields were described as being circular in form, about two feet in diameter, and made of wicker work covered with two thicknesses of Buffalo hide. Between the coverings of buffalo hide was a padding of hair about an inch thick. With the advent of the rifle the Indians probably reinforced their shields. At any rate the tough buffalo hide covering, turned flesh side out and polished as much as possible, would turn a rifle ball unless it struck it perpendicular to the surface.

411 Long after they had become acquainted with metal implements the Comanches continued to use a war club made by binding a withe around a hard stone of about two pounds in weight. A groove around the stone helped to keep it in place. The handle was about fourteen inches long. No doubt the Indians often put this stone to various uses such as driving stakes.

771 776 Very little is known about the religion of the wild Comanches. Their religious conceptions were evidently vague and they had comparatively few well established customs of religious meaning. One observer credits them with acknowledging a supreme ruler and director, whom they called the great spirit, and with worshipping the sun as the great cause of life and the earth as the receptacle and producer of all that sustains life.[23] It may well be doubted that they had any conception of a single "Great Spirit," but their veneration for the sun and earth can not be doubted. When game was brought down on a hunt the carcass was immediately prepared and cooked, but no matter how hungry the Indian might be, not a [783] bite was eaten until the chief or leader had cut off a morsel and buried it. Similarly when the chief lit his pipe the first puff of smoke was blown toward the sun and the second to the earth.[24]

734 Naturally these savages had many taboos. One or two of these may be mentioned as illustrative, for they were sometimes matters of great consequence. In 1787, the Spanish in New Mexico tried a colonization experiment with the Comanches and spent a consider-

23. Parker, Notes Taken with Marcy, 231.
24. See Noah Smithwick, The Evolution of a State, 180. Ceremonies preceding the meal similar to this were common among the plains tribes. See Hodge, I, 455.

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able sum of money building on the Arkansas a village for a certain band to move into. The Indians moved in, and all went well, until the wife of a prominent chief died and the whole band immediately moved out and sought a new location a great way off. The Spanish officer who reported this unfortunate occurrence explained that these Indians had many superstitions, one being that when any prominent person died the camp should be abandoned and the place henceforth avoided.[25] We have the account of a similar occurrence which happened many years later when the son of chief Pah-hau-ca, of the Southern Comanches, died or was killed and the chief abandoned his camp and chattels and moved far north to a new camp.[26] The Comanches would fight desperately to rescue the body of a fallen comrade so long as the scalp was intact; but the moment this was removed they would abandon the body and would not even touch it to bury it. According to some accounts they also held the heart of an animal in veneration and generally avoided touching it when dressing a carcass.[27]

In literature and art the attainments of the Comanches were slight. They had no system of writing other than that of crude pictures and these commonly pertained to wars and the chase. On skins carefully dressed, they often drew designs, a common one being the sun in the center with different colored rays of light radiating out in finely drawn lines. Their shields were generally adorned with pictures and it may be that they, like their allies the Kiowas, had a system of Heraldry.[28] Their paint was made from colored chalks or clay and their brushes from tufts of hair. For drawings of a more temporary character charcoal often served as the pencil and any smooth surface like bone, a board, or the bark of a tree served for canvas.[29]

They had a system of enumeration, but apparently little or no knowledge of the rudiments of arithmetic. The moon periods served as time units; but it does not seem that they had a calendar of any kind, other than the knowledge of the four seasons. They

25. Ugarte y Loyola to Don Fernando de la Concha, July 22, 1788, enclosing copies of reports made by the officers in New Mexico. Ms. Provincias Internas, Mexico City, Tomo 65, University of Texas Transcripts.

26. Statement of Luis Sanches, interpreter, May 1844; Ms. Texas Indian Papers, Texas State Library, Austin.

27. Smithwick, The Evolution of a State, 181.

28. See Mooney, Kiowa Calendar, 230.

29. Smithwick, The Evolution of a State, 180-181; Dr. Ferdinand Roemer, Texas (Bonn, 1849) 293 ff.

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They
533had some music, but their repertoire was limited even for savages. Noah Smithwick, who spent several months with the Comanches about 1837, states that it was customary for the first fellow who awoke in the morning to announce that fact in song; but he thought this was rather a "spontaneous outpouring akin to that of the feathered songsters than a religious rite."[30]

157 Notwithstanding their lack of culture the Comanches were not a dull people. In native ability their chiefs were a match for the keenest minds of the white men. Once in a council (the proceedings of which were carefully recorded by a secretary) President Sam Houston was trying to get the Comanches to agree to a line of division between the country of the Indians and that of their white neighbors. In the treaty the line was not being described as the Indians had been told it would be run. Buffalo Hump, a young Comanche chief, detected the discrepancy at once and a sharp argument between him and Houston followed. The dialogue is too long to be repeated, but one who reads it will be convinced that the chief knew exactly what he wanted and why he wanted it. He knew the topography of the country to perfection and also the settlements and roads. He clung persistently to his position and would not be moved from it.[31]

181 Notwithstanding their many savage vices the Comanches rated
577higher morally than other nomadic tribes. They were hospitable and would share their last morsel with their guests. In war they gave no quarter and asked none, but it was not their custom to apply slow torture to unfortunate enemies. Of course individuals differed widely. Among the Southern Comanches, chief Buffalo Hump was erratic and sometimes treacherous, but Mo-pe-cho-co-pe (Old Owl) was even tempered and altogether dependable. Robert S. Neighbors, long a Texas and United States Indian agent, knew the Old Owl for a number of years and in his reports quotes him again and again. There is nothing whatever to indicate that Neighbors ever lost confidence in the old savage or ever doubted his word.[32] There were, no doubt, many Comanches as honest as the Old Owl, but the

30. **The Evolution of a State**, 181.

31. "Minutes of a Grand Council held near the Falls of the Brazos, between the Republic of Texas and the Indians, commencing on Monday, October 7th, 1844, Ms. Texas Indian Papers.

32. For instance, see Neighbors' report to Medill, 30 Cong., 1st Session, Senate Executive Document No. 171, 16-25.

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nomadic habits of the tribe and their loose political organization made it impossible for the honest Indians to control their less scrupulous brethren and the reputation of all suffered because of the acts of a few. Furthermore, after about the middle of the nineteenth century it was almost impossible for the plains Indians to live by honest means. The inroads of whites and eastern Indians resulted in the killing off of their game so that the nomadic savages had to either steal or starve. Naturally they chose to steal. Also, the Anglo-American frontiersman had little regard for the Indians' rights and a thousand acts of injustice prompted the most horrible retaliation on the part of the savages.

The Comanches loved tobacco, but eschewed liquor until the last days of the pre-reservation period. However, even in this respect they gradually yielded to the demoralizing influence of the stronger race and drunkenness was occasionally observed. The fascination which the vices of the whites had for the savages is illustrated by an anecdote Smithwick gives in his memoirs. With chief Muguara (who was later slain in the Council House fight at San Antonio) Smithwick had visited Bastrop and the two were about to return to the Comanche village. "Juaqua," said the old chief, addressing Smithwick by his Comanche name, "hadn't we better get a bottle of fool's water? We might meet hostile Indians on the road and it would make us brave."[33]

33. The Evolution of a State, 179.

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